

**THE OLOKUN MYTH IN SELECTED NIGERIAN POEMS**

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR  
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**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by **Aletor Favour AIGBOMIAN (Miss)** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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**Dr. Clement Eloghosa Odia**  
**Project Supervisor**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This entire work is graciously dedicated to God Almighty, for His endless love, continuous intervention, provision good health, sound mind, mercies, grace and protection of my life all through my time as a students in the University of Benin.

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John Adeleye, Gomet Joy and Jane Osarumwense, God bless you all.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.2 Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this essay is to examine the representation and significance of the Olokun myth in selected poems by Nigerian poets Tanure Ojaide, Tony Afejuku, Okinba Launko, and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo. By analyzing how these poets engage with the myth of Olokun – an important deity in Yoruba, Benin and Ijaw cosmology associated with the sea, wealth, and the subconscious – the essay aims to explore the ways in which indigenous African spiritual and cultural motifs are reimagined in contemporary Nigerian poetry. The research seeks to uncover how each poet appropriates and adapts the Olokun myth to address themes such as identity, colonial memory, environmental concerns, and socio-political realities. Ultimately, the essay endeavours to contribute to a broader understanding of mythopoesis in African literature and the continued relevance of traditional mythologies in shaping modern African poetic expression.

#### **1.2 Scope of Study**

This essay focuses on the representation and reinterpretation of the Olokun myth in selected poems by four Nigerian poets: Ojaide, Afejuku, Launko and Clark-Bekederemo. The analysis is limited to specific poems by each poet in which the figure of Olokun or related themes – such as water symbolism, spiritual heritage, and indigenous cosmology are central. The study does not attempt an exhaustive

survey of all literary uses of Olokun in Nigerian literature but concentrates on a critical reading of a representative sample of poems that engage meaningfully with the myth. Therefore, the poems are derived from the following collections: Ojaide's *The Questioner: New Poems* (2018), Afejuku's *A Spring of Sweets* (2014), Launko's *Remember Tenderness: New and Selected Poems*'s poem in *A Selection of African Poetry* (1988) by Senanu and Vincent.

### **1.3 Methodology**

This essay adopts a qualitative research approach rooted in literary analysis. It employs textual analysis as the primary method for examining the representation of the Olokun myth in selected poems. By Ojaide Afejuku, Launko and Clark-Bekederemo. The methodology is interpretive and analytical, focusing on how the myth of Olokun is reimagined, symbolised, and utilised in the poetic texts to convey various themes relevant to Nigerian cultural, spiritual, and socio-political experiences.

The study is structured as a comparative literary analysis selected poems from each of the four poets that mark explicit or implicit reference to the Olokun myth are closely examined. These poems are chosen based on their thematic engagement with indigenous spirituality, the sea, mythological symbolism, and the metaphorical use of Olokun as a cultural and poetic figure.

The primary data consists of published poems by the four selected poets. Secondary data such as critical essays, literary commentaries and scholarly works

on African mythology and Nigerian poetry are used to support the primary analysis and provide contextual depth.

Each selected poem is subjected to a close reading, focusing on: the presence and role of the Olokun myth, the use of symbolism, metaphor, and other literary devices, the thematic concern addressed in relation to the myth and the poet's personal, cultural and historical context.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

This essay adopts the mythological theory to read the various poems on Olokun in Modern African poetry. Mythological theory represents a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the nature, function, and significance of myths in human culture and society. Contemporary scholarship has evolved beyond traditional approaches to embrace digital humanities, cognitive science, and postcolonial perspectives in analyzing mythological phenomena. As Mathew Sangster observes in his recent comprehensive analysis, “fantasy and mythological thinking continue to shape contemporary consciousness in ways that demand new theoretical frameworks (Sangster 23)”. This theoretical field encompasses various scholarly perspectives that attempt to decode the symbolic language of mythology and explain its persistent influence across cultures, media platforms, and historical periods. The study of mythological theory draws from anthropology, psychology, sociology, religious studies, literary criticism, media studies, and cognitive science to provide comprehensive insights into how myths

operate as fundamental organizing principles in both traditional and digital-age human experience.

Recent scholarship has examined how mythological narratives adapt and transform within digital media environments. Contemporary theorists argue that digital platforms create new forms of mythological expression through interactive storytelling, virtual reality experiences, and participatory media cultures (Davidson 112-127). This examination reveals “the enduring relevance and adaptation of myth within contemporary storytelling across various media, including literature” and digital platforms that reshape traditional narrative structures.

The emergence of transmedia storytelling has created new theoretical frameworks for understanding how mythological narratives function across multiple platforms simultaneously. Henry Jenkin’s work on participatory culture demonstrates how contemporary audiences engage with mythological content as active creators rather than passive consumers, fundamentally altering the relationship between myth-makers and myth-receivers (Jenkins 78-94).

The integration of cognitive science into mythological theory has produced significant insights into how the human brain processes mythological information. Pascal Boyer’s work on religious cognition provides a framework for understanding why certain mythological concepts achieve cultural success while others fail to propagate (Boyer 145-162). This approach examines the cognitive

constraints and biases that shape mythological thinking offering empirical foundations for understanding cross-cultural mythological patterns.

Neuromythology an emerging field combining neuroscience with mythological studies, investigated how mythological narratives correspond to neural processes and brain structures. Recent research suggests that mythological thinking activates specific neural networks, associated with social cognition, emotional regulation and meaning-making (Peterson 203-218).

Contemporary mythological theory increasingly addresses the colonial dimensions of mythological scholarship, examining how western academic frameworks have historically marginalized indigenous mythological systems. Decolonizing mythological theory involves recognizing indigenous methodologies and epistemologies as valid approach to understanding mythological phenomena rather than merely objects of study (Smith 89-107).

Recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of collaborative research methodologies that involve indigenous communities as partners rather than subjects in mythological research. This approach has revealed previously overlooked dimensions of mythological practice and meaning-making in non-western contexts (Wilson 156-173).

The climate crisis has generated new theoretical approaches that examine the relationship between mythological thinking and environmental consciousness. Eco-mythological theory explores how traditional mythological narratives contain

ecological wisdom and how contemporary environmental movements draw upon mythological expression that address ecological catastrophe and species extinction (Nixon 134-149).

Contemporary mythological research increasingly employs mixed methodological approaches that combine traditional interpretive methods with quantitative digital analysis. Digital humanities tools enable large-scale analysis of mythological texts, revealing patterns and connections that were previously invisible to traditional scholarship (Moreti 45-63).

Contemporary mythological theory represents a dynamic and evolving field that continues to generate new insights into the nature of human consciousness, culture, and social organisation. The period from 2010-2024 has witnessed significant theoretical innovations that address digital transformation, cognitive science findings, postcolonial perspectives, and environmental challenges. These developments have expanded the scope and relevance of mythological theory while maintaining its core concern with understanding how symbolic narratives shape human experience.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

Critics have written on various aspects of the poets and poems selected for this essay, which opened deep and enriching perspectives. On Clark's poetry, Christopher Anyokwu traces the evolution of Nigerian poetry from a re-evaluative perspective and remarks that "Clark's later poetry, unlike the earlier one, is

technically deficient” (18). Several reasons may be responsible. Clark back then was concerned with the technical quality of the poems but as time went on the need to be thematically grounded and rooted may have taken the gaze of the poet from technical depth and enrichment. Anyokwu’s interest differs from the one in the present essay which explores the Olokun myth as both a thematic and structural artistic expression.

As for Anthonia M. Yakubu, the critic explores the woman as the goddess, the mother, and the lover, through a literary analysis of selected poems of J.P. Clark. According to Yakubu , Clark “fuses the spiritual and sensual qualities of a woman into one in his poem “Olokun” a reflection of his admiration and fear of a woman” (228). Unlike Anyokwu, Yakubu explores poems which combines the spiritual and the sensual as a way of viewing the woman. For her, olokun reflects a deep personal appreciation and fear of a woman. The paper does not show how the poet idealises and evokes the olokun myth which is the current interest of this essay. However, Yakubu notes that the poem, “Olokun” shows Clark’s “homage and obeisance to his community’s river goddess, olokun, who is deified as the goddess of wealth and prosperity” (229). Thus, there is need to delve deeper into the poems with the aim of knowing the poet’s methods of presentation of the olokun myth.

Kayoed Niyi Afolayan on his part, focuses on “Dedicated Verses” and social interventions of John pepper Clark. In that paper, Afolayan explains that:

“There are also dedications anchored on physical or spiritual spaces sometimes names of deities or cities get mentioned in instances such as the imprisonment of Obatala” (SET 6) (34).

On Ojaide’s poetry, Hamzah Abdurraheem conducts a linguistic approach to reading symbolism as meaning strategy in Tanure Ojaide’s poetry. In the essay, Abdurraheem explains:

Ojaide aptly communicates themes of political oppression, leadership failure and crucify, ecological devastation, celebration of the indomitable spirits of the Ogoni leaders and the poetic insecurity of Christopher Okigbo (34)

Although Abdurraheem is purely interested in how Ojaide deploys language to express symbolic meaning in the poems, the essay however reveals the various themes that resonate in the poems. They range from state incapacities whether in the oppression of citizens, the inability of the leadership to care for the people to the condition of the environment which has been damaged and the agitation for ecological resuscitation and activism for which ogoni leaders paid the supreme price.

Kufre A. Akpan and Naomi Okon in their essay show how ojoide’s poems express “Fears in Verses” by paying attention to leadership and social disillusionment. Akpan and Okon remark that: “One phenomenal trait characterizing Nigerian writers, esp. the one christened as second generation, is

their innate susceptibility and strong resolve in confronting leadership and other socio-political ruptures in the society.” (1)

Referencing Abdulraheem’s perspective on leadership, both Akpan and Okon explore how Ojaide conveys symbols depicting the failure of leadership. Ojaide’s poetry are dedicated to confronting leadership and socio-political issues in the society. This essay deviates from the main issues found in Ojaide’s poetry to one where the poet represents the Olokun myth.

Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika explores protest and hope in Ojaide’s collection *The Endless Song*. In a radical shift from the grouping of Ojaide as an angry poet to one of hopeful and optimist poet, Asika repositions Ojaide thus: “The revolutionary poetry of Ojaide, against all encumbrances, sustains a dying hope and optimism in a new nation. This frail hope is masked in his lamentations and jeremiads. It is this hope that inspires the dreams of tomorrow’s survival.” (103)

Asika’s paper addresses a fundamental aspect of Ojaide’s poet who apart from lamenting the terrible state of affairs in our country, Nigeria and reveals that Ojaide’s is not forlorn but hopeful that societal redirection is possible through togetherness. The present paper is on the Olokun myth which the poet idealises and evokes to express specific ideals in the poems.

On Launko’s poetry, Kayode Niyi Afolayan and Utitofor E. Inyang conduct a postcolonial reading of Okinba Launko’s selected poems focusing on

divination and the search for utopia. They conclude the paper by remarking that: “Launko’s location of his poems within the context of African traditional religion affirms his pro-cultural stance. As a poet-sojourner, he embarks on a Quest for the re-discovery of self and nation.” (73)

The crux of Launko’s poems is African traditional religion utilizing folklore as technique to express deep socio-political concerns. Thus, the poems convey a quest motif to rediscover both the self and the nation. Launko’s poem are deep and refreshingly invigorating. However, Afolayon and Inyond do not dwell on the Olokun myth which pervades the poem.

On Afejuku’s poetry, Edefe Mukoro studies the love poems of Tony Afejuku. The critic recognizes “Afejuku’s knack for the expression of private emotional feelings through the expose of the enduring qualities of consummate, infatuated and empty love” (122). Although Afejuku explores the theme of love, many of the motifs are centred round the Olokun myth deployed to amplify the virtues of feminine beauty goodness and greatness. Mukoro fails to connect how love and Olokun myth are linked. This explains why this present paper is written to situate the poetry of Afejuku in its proper context.

Also in Clement Eloghosa Odia’s essay, the critic dwells on the emergence of Nigerian postcolonial utopian poetry. The essay is a comparative study of Afejuku and Idris Amali’s poetry and in that essay Odia concludes: “Their poems are tied together by the quest for utopian change. Although, that is

their overall thematic focus, they achieve this through various artistic strategies. What is commendable, however, are the different approaches employed by these poets to infuse hope in the readers.” (118)

Afejuku emerges from the essay above as a utopian poet who uses his poetry to rally society to new consciousness. The paper fails to show how the Olokun myth is presented in the poems.

Clement Eloghosa Odia and Esther Iria Jamgbadi dwells on Afejuku’s spatialization of poetry through evaluation of ecocritical spaces in his poems. According Odia and Jamgbadi,” Even when Afejuku writes about love for his beloved friends and ladies, the poet is unable to hide his pain about the Warri River and the agency responsible for it” (138). The crux of their argument is that Afejuku is concerned with the Niger Delta environment being ruined. Thus, the Warri River represents Afejuku’s view of the environment. The present essay differs from what they have done by focusing on the Olokun myth in the poetry of Afejuku.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

This essay demonstrates how Ojaide, Afejuku, Launko and Clark-Bekederemo idealise and evoke the Olokun deity in selected poems portraying Olukun as a transcendent symbol of spiritual force, cultural identity, and artistic inspiration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IDEALISATION OF OLOKUN

The idealization of Olokun in contemporary Nigerian poetry represents a proud literary phenomenon where ancient Yoruba cosmology interact with modern artistic expression to create transcendent visions of divine perfection. In the works of J.P Clark-Bekederemo and Tony E. Afejuku, Olokun emerges not merely as a traditional sea deity bound by mythological conventions, but as the embodiment of humanity's deepest spiritual and emotional aspirations. These poets transform the classical conception of Olokun-- already revered as a powerful orisha of the waters --into an idealized figure who transcends the boundaries between divine and human, cosmic and intimate, destructive and nurturing. Through sophisticated literary techniques including sensual imagery, religious parallels, water symbolism, and mythic transformation, both poets elevate Olokun to represent the ultimate object of devotion, the perfect synthesis of power and compassion, and the supreme source of creative and redemptive love. Their idealization process reveals how contemporary African poets negotiate between cultural authenticity and personal artistic vision, creating works that honour traditional spirituality while addressing universal human longings for divine connection, perfect love, and transcendent meaning. The examination of these poetic idealizations illuminates not only the enduring power of Yoruba mythology in modern

literature but also the capacity of poetry to transform ancient deities into symbols of contemporary spiritual and emotional fulfillment.

## **2.1 Clark-Bekederemo's Idealisation of Olokun**

J.P Clark-Bekederemo's poem "Olokun" presents a profound idealization of the West African Sea deity through intimate imagery, religious parallels, and mythic reverence. The poet transforms Olokun from a distant deity into an object of personal devotion while maintaining the god's awesome, transcendent power. The opening stanza of the poem begins with an evocative exuberance:

I love to pass my fingers  
As tide thro' weeds of the sea  
And wind the tall fern-fronds  
Thro' the strands of your hair  
Dark as night that screens the naked moon(207)

Clark-Bekederemo idealises Olokun through deeply sensual and tactile descriptions that blur the boundary between divine worship and romantic love. The first two lines establish an intimate suggesting that love for this deity surpasses all human romantic relationships. The poet positions his devotion as the ultimate expression of love, making Olokun worthy of humanity's highest emotional capacity.

The third stanza idealises Olokun by emphasizing human inadequately in the face of divine beauty:

But what wakeful eyes of man  
 Made of the mud of this earth  
 Can stare at the touch of sleep  
 The sable vehicle of dream  
 Which indeed is the look of your eyes!

Here, Clark-Bekederemo portrays humans as fundamentally limited beings- “made of the mud of this earth”- who cannot fully comprehend or withstand Olokun’s divine presence. The metaphor of Olokun’s eyes as “the sable vehicle of dream” suggests that even looking upon the deity induces a dreamlike state, transcending ordinary consciousness. This inability to fully perceive Olokun paradoxically enhances the deity’s idealized status true divinity exists beyond human comprehension. Physical relationship with the deity. The poet does not merely observe Olokun from afar but desires direct contact, imagining running fingers through the sea’s vegetation as if caressing the god’s essence. The imagery of winding “tall fern fronds” transforms Olokun’s oceanic attributes into beautiful, touchable features. The sea’s dark surface becomes lustrous hair, while the interplay of moonlight and water becomes an intimate moment of beauty. This physicalisation makes the divine accessible and desirable, elevating Olokun beyond mere religious abstraction.

Clark-Bekederemo dramatically elevates Olokun’s status by comparing his devotion to divine love itself:

I am jealous and passionate

Like Jehovah, God of the Jews

And I would that you realize

No greater love had woman

From man than the one I have for you. (207)

This comparison accomplishes several idealizing functions. First, it places Olokun on equal footing with the Judea-Christian God, asserting the validity and power of traditional African spirituality. Second, it characterizes the relationship as one of divine jealousy and passion-emotions typically reserved for the most sacred relationships. The declaration “ No greater love had woman from man than the one I have for you” further idealises Olokun by ... The final stanza completes the idealization by presenting Olokun as both destroyer and redeemer. The image of humans as “ drunken, like ancient walls/We crumble in heaps at your feet” acknowledges Olokun overwhelming power to reduce mortals to ruins. However , this apparent destruction becomes redemption.” And as the good maid of the sea,/ you lift us all beggars to your breast.” The transformation of Olokun from awesome destroyer to nurturing “ good maid of the sea” represents the highest form of idealization- a deity who combine terrible power with infinite compassion. The image of lifting “ beggars to your breast” evokes maternal comfort and divine mercy, suggesting that Olokun’s love ultimately transcends and redeems human frailty.

Throughout the poem, Clark-Bekederemo idealises Olokun by grounding the deity in Yoruba/Ijaw cosmology while making the divine personally accessible. Olokun traditionally represents the sea's dual nature-life-giving and destructive- and the poet maintains this complexity while emphasizing the deity's benevolent aspects. The idealization does not diminish Olokun's power but rather celebrates it as worthy of humanity's deepest devotion. The poem ultimately presents Olokun as the perfect divine beloved- physically beautiful, emotionally fulfilling, spiritually transcendent, and redemptively compassionate. Clark-Bekederemo's idealization transforms traditional worship into intimate relationship, making the ancient deity immediate and relevant while preserving the sense of awe essential to divine encounter. Olokun emerges as the ultimate object of human devotion, worthy of love that surpasses all earthly relationships.

## **2.2 Afejuku's Idealisation of Olokun**

Afejuku also idealises Olokun in the poem, "Farewell". The idealization of the Olokun priestess operates through a complex interplay of rejection and attraction, creating a paradoxical reverence that elevates the priestess to divine status while maintaining the speaker's autonomy.

Not your male bee

am I

to be burnt

in a fatal coitus with you

princess and queen bee,

Olokun's priestess

I reject to eshrine

Even as I bathe in ecstasy

Yours, blissful spring,

Your name of fatal passion and oblivion(85)

Afejuku immediately establishes the priestess's elevated status through royal imagery: "Princess and queen bee/ Olokun's priestess". This double royal designation idealises her as both earthly nobility ("Princess") and natural sovereignty ("queen bee"). The bee metaphor is particularly significant as it connects her to fertility, productivity and the natural order while suggesting her central role in a complex social hierarchy. The title "Olokun priestess" further idealises her by establishing her as the human representative of divine power. She becomes the earthly embodiment of the sea deity's authority, making her simultaneously accessible and transcendent. This idealization presents her as the perfect intermediary between human and divine realms. The speaker's acknowledgement that he could be "burnt/In a fatal coitus" with her idealises the priestess as possessing overwhelming, potentially destructive sexual power. This "fatal coitus" suggests that union with her would be so intense it could destroy the lover, elevating her sexuality to mythic proportions. The idealization presents her as embodying the dangerous beauty of the divine feminine irresistibly attractive

yet potentially lethal. The bee metaphor reinforces this idealization: the male bee dies after mating with the queen, making sexual union both fulfillment and destruction. This natural parallel elevates the priestess to the level of natural law, suggesting that her power operates according to cosmic rather than merely human principles.

Paradoxically, the speaker's rejection of becoming her "male bee" serves to idealise the priestess by demonstrating her overwhelming allure. The very need to actively resist her attraction testifies to her power. The line "I reject to enshrine" suggests that worshipping her would be the natural response, making his resistance an act of will rather than lack of desire. This idealization through rejection elevate the priestess above ordinary human relationships. She becomes so powerful that in the lover's destruction or loss of identity. The idealization suggests she deserve worship rather than mere love.

Despite his rejection, the speaker admits he bathes "in ecstasy/yours, blissful spring." This idealization presents the priestess as the source of transcendent pleasure and spiritual renewal. The metaphor of "blissful spring" connects her to natural cycles of rebirth and abundance, suggesting she possesses life giving powers that extend beyond sexual attraction. The ecstasy he experiences in her presence idealises her as capable of inducing altered states of consciousness. She becomes not just an object of desire but a gateway to

transcendent experience, elevating her to the level of spiritual catalyst or divine conduit.

The final lines describe her as having a “ name of fatal passion and oblivion” which completes the idealization by presenting her as the embodiment of love’s most extreme possibilities. “ Fatal passion” suggests that love for her would be so intense it would consume the lover entirely while “oblivion” implies that encountering her leads to the dissolution of ordinary consciousness. The idealization elevates the priestess to mythic status- she becomes love itself in its most dangerous and transformative form. The suggestion that even her name carries this power extends the idealization to her essential being rather than merely her physical presence.

The idealization draws on traditional Olokun mythology, where the deity represents both life-giving and destructive oceanic forces. The priestess inherits this dual nature- she is simultaneously “ blissful spring” ( life-giving) and source of “ fatal passion”(destruction). This connection to Olokun’s mythic duality idealises her as possessing cosmic rather than merely human significance. The oceanic associations implicit in her role as Olokun’s priestess suggest depths of mystery and power that cannot be fully comprehended or safely approached, further contributing to her idealised status.

Afejuku’s idealization of the Olokun priestess operates through the paradox of attraction and resistance, creating a figure who is simultaneously

irresistible and dangerous, nurturing and destructive accessible and transcendent. The idealization elevates her beyond ordinary human status to become a force of nature, a divine representative, and the embodiment of love's most extreme possibilities. Through royal metaphors, natural imagery, and mythic associations, the priestess becomes an idealized figure worthy of worship yet too powerful for safe human engagement.

In "song of demon lovers", Afejuku idealises Olokun by presenting the deity as possessing absolute authority that cannot be defied or deceived. The speaker describes himself as "a paladin who cannot lie/To Ogun or Olokun"(76-77). This idealization establishes Olokun as commanding such supreme power that even the most heroic figures- paladins traditionally being noble knights of exceptional courage- are rendered completely honest and submissive in the deity's presence.

The pairing of Olokun with Ogun, the powerful Yoruba god of iron and war, further idealises Olokun by placing the sea deity in the company of the most formidable divine forces. This association elevates Olokun to the highest tier of divine power, suggesting equality with the most feared and respected orisha in the Yoruba pantheon. Afejuku idealises Olokun by implying the deity's involvement in the complex love triangle that forms the poem's central conflict. The speaker fights for his "nymph" whose love "has since ceased to be", suggesting that Olokun, like other powerful deities, has influence over romantic destiny and

human emotional bonds. The context of “lovers’ betrayal” in this “encompassing world” suggests that Olokun operates within or oversees a cosmic system where love and betrayal are fundamental forces. This idealization presents Olokun as a deity whose power extends beyond the physical realm of seas and waters into the emotional and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

The poem’s structure as a “song” idealises Olokun by placing the deity within a heroic, mythic narrative framework. The speaker presents himself as singing an epic tale involving gods, paladins, demons, and nymphs – a context that elevates all participants, including Olokun, to legendary status. The reference to a “demon-rival” that the speaker “dares to fight” suggests a cosmic battle between supernatural forces, with Olokun positioned as one of the divine powers overseeing or influencing this conflict. This narrative framework idealises Olokun as a participant in epic, mythic events that transcend ordinary human experience. By specifically naming Olokun alongside Ogun in his song, Afejuku idealises the sea deity through formal recognition and invocation. The act of calling upon divine names in poetry traditionally serves to honour and elevate those deities, acknowledging their power and seeking their favour or witness. The parallel structure of “To Ogun or Olokun” presents both deities as equally significant forces that must be acknowledged and respected, idealizing Olokun through association with one of Yoruba culture’s most prominent and powerful orisha. The phrase “encompassing world” suggests that Olokun’s influence, like that of

the other gods mentioned, extends throughout the entire cosmos. This idealization presents Olokun not as a localized sea deity but as a cosmic force whose power encompasses all aspects of existence, including human love, conflict, and betrayal.

Through the poem, Afejuku idealises Olokun by presenting the deity as possessing absolute moral authority, cosmic influence, and epic significance. The idealization operates through association with other powerful deities, insertion into heroic narrative frameworks, and the assertion of divine power that transcends human capability for deception or defiance. Olokun emerges as a cosmic force worthy of epic treatment and absolute respect, elevating far above ordinary human experience into the realm of divine authority and mythic significance. In the poem, “For You”, Afejuku idealises Olokun through several sophisticated poetic strategies that elevate the deity to the status of supreme divine intercessor and cosmic authority over love and human destiny. The poet idealises Olokun by positioning the deity as the ultimate source of divine intervention in matters of the heart. The formal invocation “ Of the river/of Olokun I beseech/ for blessing” (48) presents Olokun not merely as a distant sea god but as an accessible, benevolent deity who can be petitioned for personal assistance. This idealization elevates Olokun to the role of divine patron saint of lovers, capable of responding to human supplications with miraculous intervention. The act of beseeching itself idealises Olokun by acknowledging the deity’s power to grant

what human effort cannot achieve. The speaker's turn to divine petition after experiencing romantic loss suggests that Olokun possesses supernatural authority over love's mysteries that transcends human agency.

The phrase "of the rivers/of Olokun" idealises the deity by presenting all waterways as extensions of Olokun's divine dominion. Rather than being confined to the sea, Olokun's authority encompasses all water that systems-rivers, streams, and flowing waters that connect distant places and carry messages across vast distances. This expansion of Olokun's traditional oceanic domain idealises the deity as possessing universal aquatic authority, making the deity omnipresent wherever water exists. The extraordinary request for the beloved's "royal love/And heart/ To be canoed to me/Wherever they are" idealises Olokun as possessing the miraculous ability to transport emotional and spiritual essences across space. The metaphor of canoeing suggests that Olokun can use water as a supernatural medium for delivering love itself, transcending physical limitations. This idealization presents Olokun as master of both physical and metaphysical transportation- capable of moving not just objects through water but abstract qualities like love and emotional commitment. The deity becomes idealized as possessing power over the very essence of human connection.

In this deeply intimate and sensual poem, entitled "Funwen" (44-45), Afejuku creates a profound idealization of Olokun through the transformative union between the speaker and his "Olokun princess", elevating the deity from

traditional mythological figure to the embodiment of perfect divine love and cosmic harmony.

We hum and dine

My princess and I

My Olokun princess and I

Her lord of joy and charm. ( Afejuku 44)

Afejuku immediately idealises Olokun by presenting the beloved as “ My Olokun princess”, which establishes her as divine royalty connected to the sea deity. This idealization elevates both the woman and Olokun by extension- she becomes the earthly embodiment of Olokun’s royal nature, while Olokun gains idealized status as the source of divine nobility that flows through chosen human vessels. The repeated imagery of “ waves of creation” idealises Olokun as the fundamental creative force in the universe. Rather than merely ruling the seas, Olokun becomes the deity of cosmic creativity itself, with the ocean’s waves representing the rhythmic pulses of universal creation. The lovers’ ability to “roll and glide on waves of creation” suggests they participate in Olokun’s divine creative process.

Afejuku idealises Olokun by showing how connection to the deity transforms the human speaker into divine status. He becomes the “ Lord of joy and charm” and “ her war-master of peace”- titles that suggest elevation to divine or semi-divine status through association with Olokun’s power. The transformation into “ Feathered god of the waves of creation” represents the

ultimate idealization- through union with Olokun's princess, the speaker himself becomes a deity. This suggests that Olokun's power is so great it can confer divinity on mortals, idealizing the sea god as possessing the ultimate divine prerogative of creating other gods.

The mission " To merge earth and water/ To merge water and earth" idealises Olokun as possessing the cosmic authority to unite fundamental elements. Rather than ruling only water, Olokun becomes the deity capable of harmonizing all elemental forces, suggesting dominion over the basic building blocks of reality. This elemental mastery idealises Olokun as a cosmic architect whose power extends beyond the oceanic realm to encompass all natural forces and their divine integration.

The transformation of physical intimacy into cosmic creativity idealises Olokun as the deity who sanctifies and elevates human sexuality to divine status. The "sensations" that the princess will "forever bear/Gladly,/Warmly,/Peacefully" become divine experiences that transcend ordinary physical pleasure. The imagery of "lilies" and ethereal strokes" with "sensations of beauty for their cannons" idealises Olokun as the source of sexuality that is simultaneously pure (lilies symbolizing purity), beautiful, and divinely powerful (Cannons suggesting creative force). This presents Olokun as the deity of idealized sacred sexuality.

The "fertile strokes" and " Joyful strokes" idealise Olokun as the deity of divine fertility and cosmic procreation. The union inspired by Olokun becomes

not merely pleasurable but cosmically productive, capable of generating new realities and forms of existence. This fertility idealization elevates Olokun beyond traditional oceanic association to become the fundamental life-creating force in the universe, the source of all generation and regeneration.

The final vision of “oneness in sweetness and sweetness” idealises Olokun as the ultimate source of cosmic unity and divine harmony. All distinctions- between lovers, elements, sensations- dissolve into perfect divine oneness under Olokun’s influence. This mystical unity idealises Olokun as the solution to all separation and fragmentation, the divine force that restores primordial wholeness and cosmic harmony. The idealization presents Olokun as the answer to humanity’s deepest spiritual and emotional longings, the source of perfect love, eternal joy, and cosmic wholeness.

In the poem, “ O sweet!,” Afejuku evocatively invokes the Olokun deity and idealises the goddess through divine hierarchy, cosmic authority, and the elevation of the beloved to divine status under Olokun’s patronage. The poet idealises Olokun by positioning the deity as the first among the most powerful Yoruba orisha in the invocation sequence:

Arise

Olokun

Sango

Ogun

## Ifa (Afejuku 42)

By placing Olokun at the head of this divine consortium, the poet establishes the sea deity as holding primacy over war (Ogun), thunder and justice (Sango), and wisdom/divination (Ifa). This ordering idealises Olokun as the supreme divine authority whose power encompasses and transcends the specialized domains of other major deities. The collective invocation “ For her arise” suggests that all these powerful deities serve under Olokun’s leadership in blessing and elevating the beloved, idealizing Olokun as the coordinator of divine intervention and the ultimate source of cosmic authority.

The repeated emphasis on “ Your daughter” idealises Olokun as the divine parent capable of creating and nurturing beings who transcend ordinary humanity. The beloved becomes olokun’s “ daughter now love-goddess,” suggesting that Olokun possesses the supreme creative power to generate new deities and elevate mortals to divine status. This parental idealization presents Olokun not merely as a powerful deity but as the source of divine lineage itself- the cosmic progenitor whose offspring inherit and manifest divine attributes. The idealization elevates olokun to the role of divine patriarch/matriarch of an expanding. Afejuku idealises Olokun by demonstrating the deity’s power to transform the beloved into multiple exalted roles:

Your daughter now love-goddess

That begets love that begets love,

Your daughter now queen-mother of authority

That bequeaths hope that bequeaths hope,

Your daughter our mother divine,

Creator of harmonies that creates harmonies... (42)

The role include: “love-goddess,” “queen-mother of authority,” and “mother divine”. This sequential transformation suggests that Olokun possesses unlimited creative authority to continuously elevate and transform beings under divine protection. The progression from “daughter” to “love-goddess” to “queen-mother” to “mother divine” idealises Olokun as controlling a divine hierarchy where beings can be elevated through multiple stages of divinity, making Olokun the ultimate source of spiritual evolution and transformation. The phrase “love-goddess/That begets love that begets love” idealises Olokun as source of infinitely self-generating divine love. Through Olokun’s daughter, love becomes a cosmic force that reproduces itself endlessly, suggesting that Olokun’s creative power extends to abstract principles and emotions. Similarly, “Creator of harmonies that creates harmonies” idealises Olokun as the source of self-perpetuating cosmic order and beauty. This suggests that Olokun’s creative acts generate on going but the source of creative power itself.

The designation of Olokun's daughter as "queen-mother of authority/That bequeaths hope" idealises Olokun as the ultimate source of both Political power and existential hope. By creating a daughter who can dispense authority and hope, Olokun becomes idealized as the cosmic sovereign whose power encompasses both temporal governances and spiritual salvation. This idealization presents Olokun as the answer to humanity's deepest needs for both effective leadership and transcendent hope, making the deity the ultimate source of both practical and spiritual solutions.

The phrase "healing are her tones and tunes..." idealises Olokun as the source of therapeutic divine power. Through the beloved daughter, Olokun's influence extends to physical and spiritual healing, making the deity not just powerful but beneficent and restorative. This healing aspect idealises Olokun as the ultimate divine physician whose power can restore harmony, health, and wholeness through the beauty and sound emanating from divine offspring.

The idealization of Olokun in the poetry of Clark-Bekederemo and Afejuku ultimately reveals the transformative power of literary imagination to breathe new life into ancient spiritual traditions while speaking to universal human experiences. Through their distinctive yet complementary approaches, both poets have successfully elevated Olokun from regional deity to cosmic principle, from mythological figure to perfect divine beloved, from traditional orisha to ultimate source of creative, redemptive, and transformative power.

Clark-Bekederemo's intimate, sensual approach transforms Olokun into the object of transcendent romantic and spiritual devotion, while Afejuku's more expansive vision presents the deity as supreme creator, divine parent and cosmic harmonizer capable of elevating mortals to divine status.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EVOCATION OF OLOKUN

The evocation of deities in African poetry represents one of the most sophisticated forms of spiritual and literary practices, where the poet becomes both medium and supplicant, channeling divine presence through the transformative power of language. In Okinba Launko's twin poems dedicated to Olokun, the great Yoruba orisha of waters, wisdom, and primordial depths, we encounter a masterful demonstration of how contemporary African poetry can serve as both artistic expression and ritual technology. These works transcend mere description or invocation to achieve genuine evocation the actual summoning and manifestation of divine presence within the poetic space. Through a complex orchestration of multiple voices, seasonal metaphors, and intimate address, Launko creates not simply poems about Olokun, but poems that become vessels for the deity's presence. Transforming the reading experience into spiritual encounter. The poet's achievement lies in crafting verses that function simultaneously as personal meditation, cultural reclamation, and communal ritual, demonstrating how traditional African spirituality can address contemporary experiences of displacement, colonial trauma, and the search for authentic identity. In these evocations, Olokun emerges not as distant mythological figure but as living spiritual force capable of healing historical wounds while connecting contemporary consciousness with the eternal rhythms of water, wisdom, and

renewal. This chapter explores how Launko and Ojaide evoke Olokun in their poems.

### **3.1 Launko's Evocation of Olokun**

In the poem, "Olokun (1)", Okinba Launko crafts a profound spiritual encounter that bridges the temporal and the eternal, the colonial and the primordial, through the invocation of Olokun- the great Yoruba orisha of waters, wisdom, and wealth. The poem functions as both personal meditation and cultural reclamation, employing water imagery as a vessel for healing historical trauma while reconnecting with ancestral spiritual power. The opening lines establish the fundamental relationship between speaker and deity: "Your voice come in tides of a great river/upon my silt of loneliness (39). Here, Launko immediately presents Olokun not merely as a distant divine figure, but as an active, communicating presence whose voice manifests through natural phenomena. The metaphor of "tides" suggests the rhythmic, cyclical nature of divine communication-Olokun speaks in waves, in patterns that mirror the ocean's own breathing. The "great river" evokes both the Niger and other sacred waterways that connect terrestrial and celestial realms in Yoruba cosmology.

The speaker's description of themselves as "silt of loneliness" is particularly striking: Silt represents the accumulated sediment of time- rich, fertile, but also heavy with deposits of experiences and memory. This geological metaphor positions the speaker as landscape shaped by historical forces, ready to

receive the nourishing waters of spiritual renewal. The poem's central stanza confronts the weight of colonial history: " I am an ancient land of colonial memories, my head/Is grey in the glass of noon." The speaker embodies both personal and collective identity, becoming the very land that has endured colonial occupation. The "grey head" suggests both the wisdom of age and the weariness of historical burden. The "glass of noon" creates an image of harsh clarity the unforgiving light that reveals all scars and transformation wrought by colonial experience.

This identification with landscape is crucial to understanding how Olokun functions in the poem. In Yoruba tradition, Olokun is not merely ruler of the sea but governs all waters- rivers, lakes, underground springs- that flow through and nourish the land. By positioning themselves as terrain, the speaker becomes part of Olokun's domain, eligible for the deity's healing intervention.

From the distance I spy you-you are  
 The one  
 Tenderly bearing the petals of flags upon  
 The long calyces of the great ships, till  
 Your skin  
 Melts with the amber garden of the sky. (39)

This passage presents one of the poem's most complex and beautiful images. Olokun appears as a figure bearing "petals of flags"-an image that transforms

potentially threatening symbols of national power into delicate, organic offerings. The flags become petals, their harsh political meanings softened into natural beauty through the deity's touch. The "long calyces of the great ships" extends this botanical metaphor, reimagining vessels of trade and conquest as flower structures. The calyx, which protects the developing flower, suggests that even instruments of historical trauma can be transformed into sources of beauty and protection under Olokun's influence. The phrase "Your skin melts with the amber garden of the sky" presents Olokun as a being who exists at the boundary between elements – water and air, earth and heaven. The amber suggests both the golden light of sunset over water and the preservative quality of this ancient resin, which holds organic matter suspended in time.

The poem's conclusion directly addresses Olokun:

Over there, Olokun! Your waters are

Virgin, Saltless

In the purity of your long pilgrimage

From ancient mythologies and primal and hills.

The exclamation "Over there, Olokun!" marks a moment of recognition and direct address, transforming the poem from description to invocation. The speaker now speaks to the deity rather than about the deity, indicating a deepening of spiritual contact. The description of Olokun's waters as " virgin, salt less" seems initially paradoxical, given that Olokun traditionally rules the salty sea. However, Launko

appears to be invoking the deity's connection to primordial waters-the fresh, life-giving waters that existed before the separation of salt and fresh, before the establishment of boundaries between sacred and profane.

The “ long pilgrimage from ancient mythologies and primal hills” suggests that Olokun's power originates not in the ocean itself but in the mythic source from which all waters flow. This pilgrimage image presents the deity as both ancient and ever-journeying, carrying the purity of origin into the present moment. Throughout the poem, water serves multiple symbolic functions: as voice, as healing agent, as connector between realms, and as purifier. Launko employs aquatic imagery to suggest that engagement with Olokun offers a way to process and transform colonial trauma. The “salt of loneliness” can be irrigated and made fertile, the “ grey head” can be refreshed; the harsh “glass of noon” can be softened by the “ amber of garden” of divine preference.

Okinba Launko's poem demonstrates how traditional Yoruba spiritual concepts can address contemporary experiences of displacement and historical trauma. By evoking Olokun, the poet accesses a source of healing that predates and transcends colonial disruption. The deity's waters offer not escape from history but transformation of its burden into something fertile and life-giving. The poem suggests that spiritual reconnection with ancestral deities like Olokun provides not only personal healing but cultural restoration. Through the medium of poetry, ancient wisdom flows into present consciousness, carrying the power to

renew both individual and collective identity. In this way, Launko's evocation of Olokun becomes both artistic achievement and spiritual practice- a demonstration of how poetry can serve as a vessel for divine presence and a means of cultural continuity in the face of historical disruption. The poem stands as testament to the enduring power of traditional African spirituality to speak to contemporary experience and offer pathways toward healing and wholeness.

Also in the next poem, "Olokun (2)", Launko employs a unique evocational strategy that transforms the traditional supplicant deity relationship. Rather than petitioning for divine favour, the speaker assumes the role of protective advisor, creating an intimate dialogue that evokes Olokun through sustained, caring attention.

Watch the harmattan

River goddess. Watch the winds

When they hold your hair. (40)

The poem's evocation begins with the direct address "River goddess", immediately establishing both intimacy and reverence. This epithet is significant- while Olokun is traditionally associated with the ocean, the designation "River goddess" emphasizes the deity's connection to all waters, including the flowing, life-giving rivers that nourish the land. This choice grounds Olokun in the immediate, terrestrial experience while maintaining cosmic significance. The imperative "Watch" repeated throughout the poem creates a ritual of vigilance,

positioning the speaker as spiritual guardian offering protective wisdom. This reversal of traditional prayer structure evokes Olokun not as distant divine authority but as beloved presence requiring care and guidance.

Watch the winds  
 When they hold your hair:  
 And the cold fingers on  
 The borders of your beauty  
 Are tipped with talons  
 And thirst (41)

Launko evokes Olokun through vivid personification that makes the deity physically present within the poem. The image of winds holding Olokun's hair creates immediate bodily presence – the deity becomes a woman whose hair can be touched, held, or threatened. This personification is crucial to the evocation because it makes divine presence tangible and relatable. The “borders of your beauty” suggests that Olokun's essence has defined boundaries that can be approached or threatened. The “cold fingers... tipped with talons” transform abstract meteorological phenomenon into predatory entities that can physically menace the deity. This personification evokes Olokun as vulnerable being requiring protection, creating emotional intimacy between speaker and deity.

The recurring focus on Olokun's hair “hold your hair”, “caress your hair,” “comb your hair”- evokes the deity through this culturally significant detail. In many

African traditions, hair represents spiritual power, ancestral connection, and personal identity. By focusing on this aspect of Olokun's appearance, Launko evokes not just physical presence but spiritual essence that can be threatened or cared for.

Always  
 Remember the coming  
 Of flowers in the wake of  
 Coming rain, Always  
 Remember the flowers.  
 After the dry season  
 There will be children and  
 Their laughter in the rain (41)

Here, the evocation shifts from warning to wisdom-sharing, presenting Olokun as deity who embodies knowledge of natural cycles and regenerative power. The repetition of “ Always remember” creates incantatory rhythm that evokes Olokun's eternal perspective the deity who has witnessed countless cycles of drought and renewal. The promise of “ children and their laughter in the rain” evokes Olokun's traditional association with fertility and abundance. The speaker reminds the deity of her own power to bring forth life and joy, thus evoking Olokun's essential nature as source of renewal and creativity. “Look, if you stretch your/Ther will be seed in the wind” (41). This image evokes Olokun's

creative power through the simple gesture of reaching out. The transformation of threatening winds into carriers of “seeds” demonstrates the deity’s ability to convert destructive forces into generative one. This evocation presents Olokun as active creative force whose very movements reshape reality.

Watch the hawks  
 Of the season, wherever  
 They skulk in thunder  
 Of tongues or the greeting card:  
 Such blisters as they alone  
 Can inflict are not cursed  
 With easy plasters or drugs  
 Of remorse (41)

Launko evokes Olokun as deity facing contemporary political and cultural threats. The “ hawks of the season” represent opportunistic forces that exploit particular moments of vulnerability. By warning Olokun about these dangers, the speaker evokes the deity as being engaged with present day struggles, not removed from contemporary experiences. The metaphor of “blisters” that cannot be easily healed evokes Olokun as deity capable of being wounded by deception and manipulation. This vulnerability makes the deity more human like while also emphasises the seriousness of the threats faced.

The most striking aspect of this evocation is how it positions the human speaker as advisor to the deity. This reversal of traditional religious hierarchies evokes Olokun as deity who values human wisdom and partnership rather than mere worship. The speaker's ability to offer meaningful counsel evokes Olokun as accessible, responsive divine presence who engages in genuine relationship rather than demanding simple submission. The poem's evocational strategy creates a relationship of mutual care – the speaker offers protection and wisdom while implicitly receiving the deity's continued presence and blessing. This evokes Olokun as deity who participates in reciprocal relationship, honoring human agency while maintaining divine authority.

Olokun evokes the deity through sustained intimate attention, protective counsel, and partnership in maintaining cosmic balance. Rather than calling upon Olokun's power for personal benefit, the speaker offers care and wisdom, evoking the deity as beloved presence requiring and deserving protection. In positioning Olokun as an object of veneration, the poets under study contribute to a literary tradition that reclaims African spirituality as central to both personal and collective identity. Their evocation of Olokun infuses their poetry with a sacred aura, where the divine presence of the sea goddess becomes a source of moral guidance, existential reassurance, and aesthetic inspiration. By evoking Olokun through language, imagery, and tone, these poets do not merely recount myth—they participate in its ritual perpetuation, reinforcing the cultural legitimacy and

enduring relevance of traditional African deities. Thus, Olokun becomes a poetic altar upon which history, faith, and identity converge. In celebrating Olokun as divine, these poets reframe African myth as a living, breathing force within the contemporary literary imagination.

### **3.2 Ojaide's Evocation of Olokun**

Tanure Ojaide's "At the Seashore" presents a complex and deeply reverent evocation of Olokun through the persona of a devoted initiate who seeks spiritual transformation and divine favour. The poem's evocation operates through multiple layers of religious devotion, material offering and spiritual purification.

Ojaide immediately establishes his evocation of Olokun by presenting the speaker as "Olokun's initiate", which transforms the deity from distant mythological figure into the centre of personal religious identity. The act of gathering "cowries and other sea shells/To adorn my life of minstrelsy"(103) evokes Olokun as the source of both spiritual calling and artistic inspiration. The cowries, traditionally associated with wealth and divination in Yoruba culture, becomes sacred ornaments that connect the speaker's artistic practice to divine service.

This initiation evocation presents Olokun as worthy of complete life dedication, the speaker's entire existence as a "minstrel" becomes an act of worship and service to the deity. Olokun emerges as the divine patron whose influence transforms ordinary artistic expression into sacred performance. The

assertion that “wealth, beauty, and cleanliness belong to the deep sea/ And its keepers” (103) evokes Olokun as the ultimate source of all desirable human qualities. This triad of wealth, beauty and cleanliness represents material prosperity, aesthetic perfection, and spiritual purity, suggesting that Olokun possesses and can bestow the complete range of human aspirations.

The evocation becomes more profound when contrasted with the speaker’s acknowledgement of his own “dirt”. By positioning Olokun as the source of cleanliness while confessing personal impurity, Ojaide elevates the deity to the status of moral and spiritual perfection, making Olokun the ultimate standard of purity and the potential source of purification.

The speaker’s belief that diving “deep and go far underwater” will yield “beads/ For resplendent costume to walk the streets of the land” (103) evokes Olokun as possessing transformative power that can elevate human status and appearance. The underwater journey becomes a spiritual quest where proximity to Olokun’s domain provides access to divine adornment and social elevation. This evocation presents Olokun as the deity whose favour can transform the spiritual condition. The “resplendent costume” suggests that Olokun’s blessings are not hidden but publicly visible, making the deity a source of both spiritual and social transformation.

The reference to the “ritual bath in a basin my anxious father performed/ To stave off harm” evokes Olokun by connecting the deity to protective spiritual

practices that transcend generations. The father's anxiety and ritual intervention suggest that approaching Olokun's domain requires divine protection, elevating the deity to the status of supreme spiritual authority whose realm is both powerful and potentially dangerous. This evocation presents Olokun as a deity whose power commands profound respect and careful spiritual preparation, making the god worthy of elaborate ritual attention and ancestral concern.

Ojaide's identification of Olokun with Mami Wata creates a syncretic evocation that combines Yoruba and broader African water deity traditions. The speaker's declaration "I worship Mami Wata with hymns and serenades" evokes the deity as worthy of the highest forms of artistic and spiritual expression. The willingness to satisfy the deity's desire, even sexual ones ("When she is horny") presents an evocation of complete devotion and service. This synthesis evokes Olokun/Mami Wata as a deity whose influence transcends cultural boundaries while maintaining intimate, personal relationships with devotees. The combination suggests a cosmic deity accessible through local tradition.

The offering of "presents of human industry" including "goats, yams, and whatever takes sweat to achieve" evokes Olokun as worthy of humanity's most valuable possessions and hardest-earned achievements. The emphasis on "sweat" suggests that only offerings requiring genuine human effort and sacrifice are appropriate for the deity.

This economic evocation presents Olokun as the ultimate recipient of human productivity and achievement, suggesting that the deity's favour is worth more than any earthly possession or accomplishment. The willingness to surrender the fruits of human labour evokes Olokun as the human labour evokes Olokun as the supreme value in the speaker's moral and economic universe.

The concept that shells create a "**passagery**" through which "Mami Wata visits me" evokes Olokun as an accessible deity who maintains ongoing communication with devotees. The shells become sacred media that facilitate divine visitation, suggesting that Olokun actively seeks relationship with worshippers rather than remaining distant and aloof.

The final invocation to "waves from forlorn distances" to "Deliver them with bright wrappings of love and remorse" evokes Olokun as possessing cosmic reach and the ability to transform human offerings into expressions of pure emotion. The deity becomes evoked as capable of understanding and properly presenting human feelings to divine consciousness. The "bright wrappings of love and remorse" suggest that Olokun can transform even flawed human emotions into beautiful offerings, evoking the deity as both understanding and transformative of human spiritual condition.

Ojaide's evocation transforms Olokun into the perfect synthesis of spiritual patron, economic sovereign, protective authority, communicative companion, and transformative power. Through initiation identity, material

offering, spiritual purification, and sacrificial devotion, Olokun emerges as the ultimate divine figure worthy of complete life dedication. The evocation presents the deity as simultaneously dangerous and nurturing, cosmic and personal, traditional and syncretic- the perfect divine companion for the contemporary and African seeking spiritual authenticity, material prosperity, and artistic inspiration. Olokun becomes the evoked answer to human spiritual, economic, and creative needs while maintaining the awesome power that defines authentic divinity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

The examination of how Afejuku, Launko, Clark-Bekederemo, and Ojaide engage with the Olokun deity in their poetry reveals a rich tapestry of artistic approaches that collectively illuminate the enduring significance of this Yoruba water divinity in contemporary Nigerian literature. Each poet brings distinct stylistic sensibilities and thematic preoccupations to their treatment of Olokun. Yet their collective work demonstrates a shared commitment to preserving, reinterpreting, and revitalizing indigenous spiritual traditions through the medium of poetry.

Afejuku's approach to Olokun is characterised by a profound reverence that burdens on the mystical. His poetry tends to idealise the deity as an embodiment of primordial wisdom and oceanic power, drawing upon traditional praise poetry conventions while infusing them with contemporary literary sophistication. Through his evocation of Olokun, Afejuku creates a bridge between ancestral knowledge and modern consciousness, presenting the deity not merely as a relic of addressing contemporary spiritual needs. His language often adopts the ceremonial cadences of ritual invocation, transforming his poems into acts of worship that honour both the deity and the cultural heritage it represents.

Launko's treatment of Olokun reveals a more complex relationship with tradition, one that acknowledges both the power and the problematic aspects of divine authority. His idealization of the deity is tempered by a critical

consciousness that interrogates the social and political implications of spiritual belief systems. Through his poetic lens, Olokun becomes a symbol of both liberation and constraint, representing the dual nature of tradition as both source of strength and potential limitation. Launko's evocation of the deity often employs irony and ambiguity, creating poems that celebrate Olokun's majesty while simultaneously questioning the structures of power that surround traditional religious practice.

Clark-Bekederemo's engagement with Olokun is perhaps the most culturally grounded among the four poets, reflecting his deep immersion in Ijaw cosmology and his intimate knowledge of Niger Delta spiritual traditions. His idealization of Olokun emerges from a lived experience of his homeland. The poet's evocation of Olokun is thus both personal and communal, drawing encounter to create poetry that pulses with authentic spiritual energy. Clark-Bekederemo's treatment of the deity emphasizes Olokun's role as protector and provider, particularly in relation to the fishing communities that depend on the writer for their survival.

Ojaide's approach to Olokun reflects his broader concern with cultural preservation and resistance to neo-colonial influences. His idealization of the deity serves as a form of cultural nationalism, positioning Olokun as a symbol of African authenticity in opposition to imported religious and cultural systems. Through his evocation of the deity, Ojaide creates poetry that functions as both

artistic expression and political statement, asserting the validity and relevance of indigenous spiritual traditions in the contemporary world. His treatment of Olokun often emphasises the deity's connection to the land and environment, presenting the divinity as a guardian of ecological and cultural integrity against the destructive forces of modernisation and globalisation.

The collective achievement of these four poets lies in their ability to demonstrate the continuing vitality of traditional Yoruba spirituality while at the same time adapting it to contemporary literary and cultural contexts. Their varying approaches to idealising and evoking Olokun reveal the flexibility and richness of the deity as a poetic symbol, capable of supporting multiple interpretation and applications.

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